

O 181119Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2432
INFO AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
CDR USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY
CJTF HOA PRIORITY
DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANTANANARIVO 000353

STATE FOR AF/E - MBEYZEROV
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/14/2014
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [MA](#) [UN](#)
SUBJECT: MADAGASCAR: TGV RENEGES, AU TAKES OVER, AND EU
BEGINS DIALOGUE

REF: ANTANANARIVO 340

Classified By: AMBASSADOR NIELS MARQUARDT FOR REASONS 1.5 D AND E

11. (C) SUMMARY: With Andry "TGV" Rajoelina now explicitly conditioning his decision not to run on Zafy, Ravalomanana, and Ratsiraka following suit, it is unclear whether this key provision of the "Transition Charter" under negotiation here is still viable. The EU "Political Dialogue" is scheduled for May 18-20, with non-resident EU ambassadors joining the three who live here. Special Envoys from the AU, UN, SADC, and Francophonie are still all present in Madagascar to coordinate next steps. The SADC Envoy said today that he has agreed to put his support behind the draft Transition Charter, indicating a significant shift away from SADC's March 30 statement calling for Ravalomanana's unconditional return -- which he must now sell to King Mswati and other SADC heads of state. He will also stop in Jo'Burg to try to sell Ravalomanana on the charter. END SUMMARY.

DIFFICULT TERMS OF THE TRANSITION

12. (C) TGV did not quickly follow up his decision not to run (reftel) with a public announcement or speech, and public word of it instead came, awkwardly, via a leak attributed to the Quai d'Orsay that same afternoon. The French MFA spokesman then made an official statement Wednesday calling on TGV to confirm in public what he had said in private. UN mediator Drame told Ambassador Marquardt that TGV had called him multiple times in a panic over the way the news had leaked, over the harshly negative reaction of his partisans, and especially over the outright rejection of his position by former President Ratsiraka from Paris. TGV called Ratsiraka on Tuesday with his decision and his proposal that other former heads of state agree not to run either, which Ratsiraka immediately rejected, along with the notion of TGV remaining as the head of the transition government: Ratsiraka recalled their prior agreement and insisted that the top job should be his. Ravalomanana, for his part, took a very intransigent position in a May 14 RFI interview which aired repeatedly here, insisting that he will come back soon to retake power. This unfortunate sequence led TGV instead to distance himself from previous statements, asserting that he had only meant that he would bow out of the race if the former presidents did so as well. The transition government is doing its best to sell this as a reasonable offer and a show of good faith, but many questioned whether Ratsiraka and Ravalomanana would agree to these terms, even before their positions became public knowledge.

13. (C) These developments took place as a new envoy from SADC (former Swazi Prime Minister Absalom Themba Dlamini) joined those from the International Organization of the Francophonie (former Togolese Prime Minister Edem Kodjo) and the AU (Ablasse Ouedraogo), who had been absent from Madagascar since before the April 30 contact group meeting in Addis Ababa. UN Senior Mediator Drame has been working solo for the past two weeks, but all these organizations' efforts now fall under AU coordination. The Tana diplomatic corps met with them all on May 15; the envoys spoke in turn of their desire to press forward on Drame's "Charter for the Transition", and the ambassadors present used the opportunity to raise key concerns about the process. Ouedraogo focused on the need to move quickly to alleviate suffering, echoing UN concerns about their ability to respond to Madagascar's significant humanitarian problems regardless of political turmoil. The French ambassador pointed out what he saw as "rays of hope" (TGV's stated willingness not to run) in the "institutional fog" invoked by the UN envoy, and expressed his agreement that the contact group should move quickly in order to facilitate a resumption of foreign assistance. The German ambassador inquired about SADC's support for the Charter, without specifically referring to that organization's official position favoring Ravalomanana's reinstatement; Dlamini stated only that he looked forward to dialogue, but agreed that the Charter would be a good basis for discussions - and didn't specifically refer to Ravalomanana's return. Ambassador Marquardt pointed out the difficulties posed by the ongoing atmosphere of intimidation that prevails in Tana, and the fact that key members of the "legalist" or pro-Ravalomanana camp were either imprisoned or in hiding, which makes honest dialogue nearly impossible.

14. (C) Subsequently, on May 18, the ICG-M met formally for the first time in Tana, under Ouedraogo's leadership. Much of the meeting was strictly procedural, but it provided Dlamini of SADC the opportunity to confirm clearly that he is now in full support of the draft Transition Charter, despite the significant change it represents from SADC's March 30 statement calling for Ravalomanana's unconditional return to power. He said he will soon have to return to South Africa and Swaziland, perhaps later this week, to brief the SADC Troika. However, he said that his first stop will be to see Ravalomanana in Johannesburg and try to change his mind on the viability of his stated plan to return soon. He will then brief the King and seek his agreement to a changed approach. Dlamini was noncommittal on whether or not he thought the Charter could succeed as presently construed; "it is a starting point in a negotiation," he summarized. Questions asked of the Libyan ambassador about TGV's weekend visit to see Qaddhafi in Libya went unanswered, as he claimed he had no information from Tripoli. (Note: Also discussed on the margins of the ICG-M were rumors that TGV will travel to Senegal to see Wade on Thursday, followed by a stop in Algeria afterwards that might be an effort to obtain stopgap funding for the HAT. End note.). It was decided that the ICG-M will meet every Friday morning here in Tana.

EU POLITICAL DIALOGUE BEGINS

15. (C) The European Union will be in the spotlight from May 18-20, as EU member states engage in their first collective talks with the transition government. This "political dialogue", convened per the 2000 Cotonou agreement, will result in a joint statement which sets the tone for a further 120-day consultation period after which final decisions will be made concerning EU assistance and cooperation. Most EU member states suspended new programs and new money after the March 17 coup, but will refrain from terminating their ongoing assistance until this 120-day period ends in August. As the Czech Republic currently holds the EU presidency, the Czech Ambassador in Addis Ababa will preside over the talks; several other non-resident Ambassadors -- UK, Austrian, Dutch, and Belgian -- have flown in to attend as well. Had the Czechs decided not to attend, the French ambassador would have chaired the talks - to the dismay of Britain and Germany (who are more inclined to take a harder line against the HAT), as well as the Brussels-based EU diplomatic corps, who

were reportedly concerned about questions of protocol if the still-unaccredited French ambassador were to take the reins. In the event, the Czechs are reportedly more likely to take a principled stance against the leaders of what the EU has already termed "an army-backed coup d'etat" (European Parliament resolution of May 7, 2009), as will the majority of non-resident ambassadors. Their final position will be elaborated in a press statement on May 20.

16. (C) COMMENT: TGV's waffled announcement last week was not unexpected, but it was a useful demonstration of just how limited his power really is. Sources within the UN mediation team continue to believe that TGV is ready to sign the Charter of the Transition as it stands, but they face two large obstacles: the powerful forces surrounding TGV who have no interest in compromising, and the public rejections of Ratsiraka and Ravalomanana. Both former presidents are playing for time and likely believe they will benefit from the transitional government's eventual failure. TGV's trip to Libya is being portrayed in the local media as a breakthrough leading to recognition, but in fact the reality seems to fall far short of that goal. It remains to be seen whether he travels this week to Dakar and Algiers, and if so, what he will bring back with him. END COMMENT.

MARQUARDT